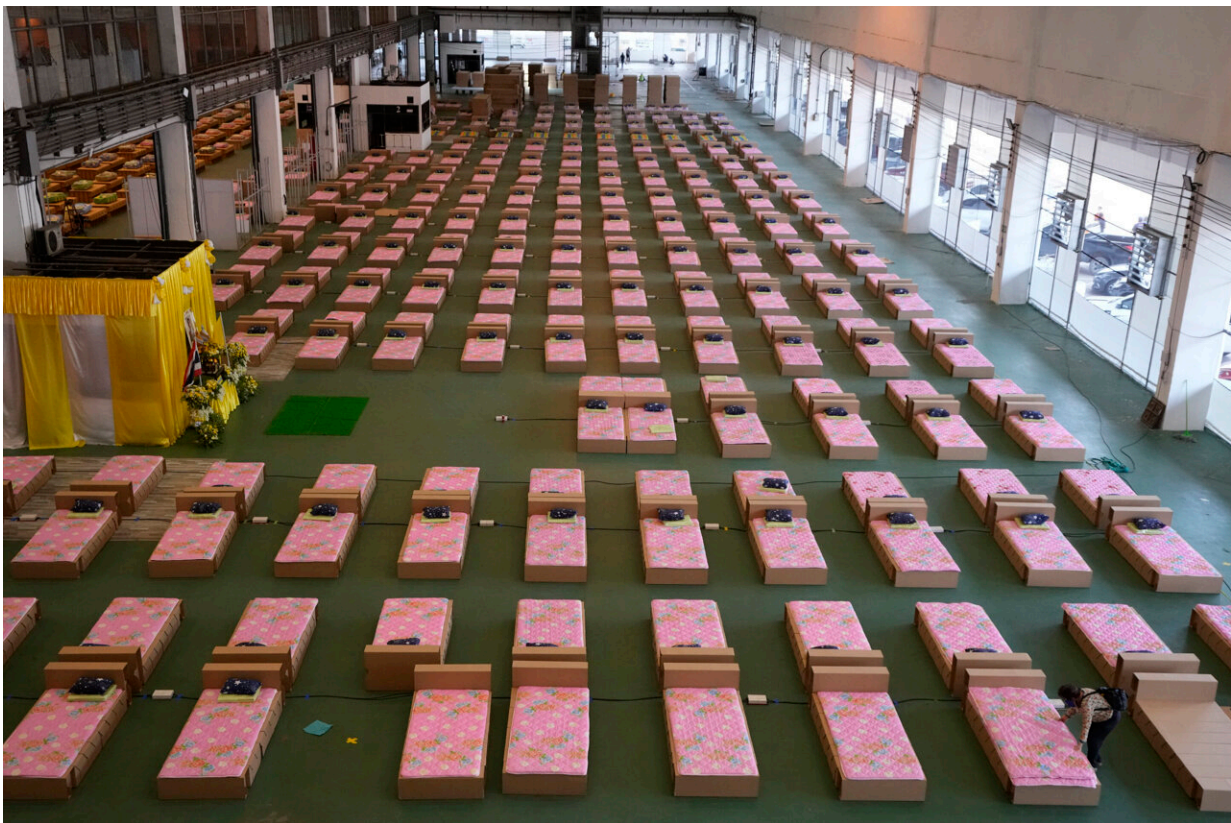


Thailand builds another field hospital for virus-hit Bangkok

July 30 2021, by Tassanee Vejpongsa and Chalida Ekvitthayavechnukul



A 1,800-bed field hospital is set up inside a cargo building in Don Mueang International Airport in Bangkok, Thailand, Thursday, July 29, 2021. Health authorities raced on Thursday to set up yet another large field hospital in Thailand's capital as the country recorded a new high in COVID-19 cases and deaths. The hospital, one of many already in use, was being set up at one of Bangkok's two international airports after the capital ran out of hospital beds for thousands of infected residents. Credit: AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit

Health authorities in Thailand raced to set up a large field hospital in a cargo building at one of Bangkok's airports on Thursday as the country reported record numbers of coronavirus cases and deaths.

Other field hospitals are already in use in the capital after it ran out of hospital facilities for thousands of infected residents.

Workers rushed to finish the 1,800-bed hospital at Don Mueang International Airport, where beds made from cardboard box materials were laid out with mattresses and pillows. It is to be ready for patients in two weeks.

The airport, a domestic and regional hub, has had little use because almost all domestic flights were canceled two weeks ago.

The quick spread of the delta variant also led neighboring Cambodia to seal its border with Thailand on Thursday and order a lockdown and movement restrictions in eight provinces.

Thailand reported 17,669 new cases and 165 deaths on Thursday, its highest number since the pandemic began in early 2020. Of those, 7,875 cases and 127 deaths were in metropolitan Bangkok, a region of nearly 15 million people.

Bangkok and its surrounding provinces have been in lockdown for more than two weeks, with overnight curfews and access only to supermarkets, pharmacies and essential services such as hospitals.



A worker installs partitions at field hospital set up inside a cargo building in Don Mueang International Airport in Bangkok, Thailand, Thursday, July 29, 2021. Health authorities raced on Thursday to set up yet another large field hospital in Thailand's capital as the country recorded a new high in COVID-19 cases and deaths. The hospital, one of many already in use, was being set up at one of Bangkok's two international airports after the capital ran out of hospital beds for thousands of infected residents. Credit: AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit

Authorities said about 6,100 patients in the Bangkok area are waiting for beds. Of those, 103 are in critical condition, 1,410 have moderate symptoms and 4,662 have mild symptoms. Nearly a quarter of a million people around the country are in medical facilities, some with symptoms and some without.

Thailand has recorded a total of 561,030 cases and 4,562 deaths. More than 90% have been reported during the surge that began in early April.

At a market near the airport, a few people were out shopping and many said they were concerned about the virus's spread.

"I watched the news and I got so stressed and depressed about so many people needing help. I don't leave the house very often anymore, only once in a while when it becomes necessary to buy some supplies," said Chaninart Aimat, a 32-year-old office worker.



A worker carries a pipe while preparing a field hospital set up inside a cargo building in Don Mueang International Airport in Bangkok, Thailand, Thursday, July 29, 2021. Health authorities raced on Thursday to set up yet another large field hospital in Thailand's capital as the country recorded a new high in

COVID-19 cases and deaths. The hospital, one of many already in use, was being set up at one of Bangkok's two international airports after the capital ran out of hospital beds for thousands of infected residents. Credit: AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's government is facing harsh criticism over its handling of the virus surge and slow vaccination program, amid reports of people dying in the streets or in their homes while waiting for treatment.

Thailand hopes to provide 100 million doses of vaccines and inoculate 70% of its population within this year. So far it has administered 16.6 million doses nationwide. Around 18.5% of its 69 million people have received at least one dose while 5.5% are fully vaccinated.

On Wednesday, Swiss Humanitarian Aid dispatched 100 respirators and more than a million antigen tests to Bangkok to help fight the outbreak, while Britain is to send 415,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine within two weeks.

Meanwhile, 1.5 million doses of Pfizer vaccine donated by the U.S. government are to arrive Saturday morning.



Workers prepare a field hospital set up inside a cargo building in Don Mueang International Airport in Bangkok, Thailand, Thursday, July 29, 2021. Health authorities raced on Thursday to set up yet another large field hospital in Thailand's capital as the country recorded a new high in COVID-19 cases and deaths. The hospital, one of many already in use, was being set up at one of Bangkok's two international airports after the capital ran out of hospital beds for thousands of infected residents. Credit: AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit



A volunteer and a worker prepare a 1,800-bed field hospital set up inside a cargo building in Don Mueang International Airport in Bangkok, Thailand, Thursday, July 29, 2021. Health authorities raced on Thursday to set up yet another large field hospital in Thailand's capital as the country recorded a new high in COVID-19 cases and deaths. The hospital, one of many already in use, was being set up at one of Bangkok's two international airports after the capital ran out of hospital beds for thousands of infected residents. Credit: AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit



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A worker prepares a 1,800-bed field hospital set up inside a cargo building in Don Mueang International Airport in Bangkok, Thailand, Thursday, July 29, 2021. Health authorities raced on Thursday to set up yet another large field hospital in Thailand's capital as the country recorded a new high in COVID-19 cases and deaths. The hospital, one of many already in use, was being set up at one of Bangkok's two international airports after the capital ran out of hospital beds for thousands of infected residents. Credit: AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit



A volunteer walks past a 1,800-bed field hospital set up inside a cargo building in Don Mueang International Airport in Bangkok, Thailand, Thursday, July 29, 2021. Health authorities raced on Thursday to set up yet another large field hospital in Thailand's capital as the country recorded a new high in COVID-19 cases and deaths. The hospital, one of many already in use, was being set up at one of Bangkok's two international airports after the capital ran out of hospital beds for thousands of infected residents. Credit: AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit



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"We will be sending no less than 1.5 million doses of COVID vaccine, in fact the goal is 2.5 (million). But the first shipment will be 1.5 (million)," said Thai-born U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth.

Neighboring Cambodia is to receive its first batch of 1 million vaccines donated by the U.S. on Friday, as it takes steps to slow a surge around

the country thought to be caused by Cambodian workers fleeing Thailand.

Prime Minister Hun Sen said the border will be shut to everything except commercial traffic until Aug. 12.

Cambodia's health ministry on Thursday reported 765 new cases and 11 deaths. It has confirmed a total of 75,152 cases and 1,339 deaths.

Unlike Thailand, more than 40% of its population has had at least one vaccine dose. Cambodia plans to vaccinate at least 12 million of its approximately 17 million people.

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